

IN THE CLAIMS:

Amend Claims 17, 19, and 22 as set forth below:

1. – 16. (canceled)

17. (currently amended) A method of operating a sea-based aircraft, comprising:

- (a) equipping an aircraft with a payload;
- (b) configuring the aircraft itself in a watertight configuration;
- (c) storing the aircraft on a ship;
- (d) releasing the aircraft into a body of water such that the aircraft is at least partially submerged in the body of water;
- (e) propelling the aircraft out of the body of water;
- (f) sustaining flight of the aircraft with a jet engine;
- (g) utilizing the payload of the aircraft;
- (h) landing the aircraft in the body of water; and
- (i) retrieving the aircraft onto the ship.

18. (original) The method of claim 17, further comprising refitting the aircraft with another payload and repeating steps (b) through (i).

19. (currently amended) The method of claim 17, further comprising returning the aircraft to a designated recovery point in the body of water and ~~[[shuts]]~~ shutting down the jet engine prior to step (h).

20. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein step (b) is repeated before step (h).

21. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein step (h) comprises splashing down directly into the body of water.

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 17, wherein step ~~[[b]]~~ (e) comprises using rocket boosters.

23. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein step (g) comprises attacking a target with munitions and providing reconnaissance.

24. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein step (d) comprises unfolding wings of the aircraft from a retracted storage position to an extended flying position, and step (i) comprises folding the wings from the extended flying position to the retracted storage position.

25. (original) The method of claim 17, wherein steps (c) and (i) comprise using a submerged submarine.

26. (original) The method of claim 25, wherein the aircraft is released from and retrieved into a converted missile tube in the submarine.

Add the following new claims:

27. (new) The method of claim 17, further comprising equipping the aircraft without landing gear or flotation pontoons.

28. (new) The method of claim 17, further comprising internally pressurizing the aircraft to offset and balance external hydrostatic water pressure loads, operating inlet and nozzle close-off doors with inflatable watertight seals to make the jet engine watertight, treating manufacturing joints, seams, and airframe penetrations with sealant and appliqué tapes for further enabling the watertight configuration.

29. (new) The method of claim 17, wherein steps (h) and (i) comprise shutting down the jet engine and enabling the watertight configuration for the jet engine before being recovered by a submerged submarine.

30. (new) A method of operating a sea-based aircraft, comprising:

- (a) equipping an aircraft with a payload;
- (b) configuring the aircraft itself in a watertight configuration;

- (c) storing the aircraft on a ship;
- (d) releasing the aircraft into a body of water such that the aircraft is at least partially submerged in the body of water;
- (e) unfolding wings of the aircraft from a retracted storage position to an extended flying position while the aircraft is at least partially submerged in the body of water;
- (f) propelling the aircraft out of the body of water with rocket boosters;
- (g) sustaining flight of the aircraft with a jet engine;
- (h) utilizing the payload of the aircraft;
- (i) returning the aircraft to a designated recovery point in the body of water and reconfiguring the aircraft in a watertight configuration during flight prior to a splashdown;
- (j) splashing down directly into the body of water; and
- (k) retrieving the aircraft onto the ship.

31. (new) The method of claim 30, further comprising refitting the aircraft with another payload and repeating steps (b) through (k).

32. (new) The method of claim 30, wherein step (h) comprises attacking a target with munitions and providing reconnaissance.

33. (new) The method of claim 30, wherein steps (c) and (k) comprise using a submerged submarine, the aircraft is released from and retrieved into a converted missile tube in the submarine, and the wings from in the retracted storage position during steps (c) and (k).

34. (new) The method of claim 30, further comprising equipping the aircraft without landing gear or flotation pontoons.

35. (new) The method of claim 30, wherein step (b) comprises internally pressurizing the aircraft to offset and balance external hydrostatic water pressure loads, operating inlet and nozzle close-off doors with inflatable watertight seals to make the jet engine watertight, treating manufacturing joints, seams, and airframe penetrations with sealant and appliqué tapes for further enabling the watertight configuration.

36. (new) The method of claim 30, wherein step (i) comprises shutting down the jet engine and enabling the watertight configuration for the jet engine prior to splashdown and before being recovered by a submerged submarine.